

## Dealing with a Hostile Audience

**Hostility is a reasonable response to many presentations.** You may well be uncomfortable with your audience's hostility but what will you sacrifice to avoid it?

**If you have a hard time with the audience's provocation,** give this presentation for history. Think about the record you will leave rather than the moment you are in.

### 1. The audience

Assess your audience—get in their heads. What do they think the problem is? Not the topic, but the *problem*? What do they think and feel now?

### 2. The information

Draft the information, initially, as though you were reporting an emerging news story—as simply, clearly, directly, and neutrally as possible. Believing your audience's hostility is justified or unjustified influences *what* you say, not *how* you say it.

### 3. The delivery

Treat difficult news with dignity and respect. Find neutral and stay there. Neutral delivery is an acquired skill. See Prime Minister David Cameron's 9/25/12 clip for delivery that is neutral and emphatic. [Cameron is not addressing a hostile audience; his delivery is the point of this clip] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mavTTc21sCY>  
Irritation looks dismissive to the audience. Beware the snappy comeback.

### 4. The interaction

Go for the dignity vote not the sympathy vote, no matter how you feel.  
The way to give up the power of the presenter is to go for pity or self-pity.  
12/25/11 Italian Welfare Minister Elsa Fornero  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVRJ18oHsa8>

Compare delivery to 10/18/12 Tasmanian Premier Lara Giddings  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-18/tasmanian-premier-issues-apology-for-forced/4320600> [9:21-12:43] These are offered as examples of delivery.

### More

The dominant feeling in the room when you're being heckled or challenged is: What's going to happen? What's she going to do?

Sharing the power of the presentation is a judgment call.

What you see work in a movie isn't going to work when you do it.

Please don't be naïve.

### Blueprint for speaking well in tough moments

**Clear content**  
**Neutral tone**  
**Temperate phrasing**

- **Clear content:** Let your words do your work for you. Say what you mean. Put the weight of your communication on your words.
- **Neutral tone:** ‘Tone’ here means the non-verbal part of your delivery: facial expression and body language as well as tone of voice. Neutral tone makes you put the emphasis on words, instead of giving the counterpart something to read that competes with the words.
- **Temperate phrasing:** This is the place to exercise your tact. Have you ever prepared for an upcoming difficult conversation and told yourself, ‘You can’t say *that*.’ If your message is correct, maybe the alteration you really want is, ‘You can’t say that *that way*.’ English is a huge language; there are lots of ways to say things. Temperate phrasing keeps your counterpart focused on the content of your message, rather than reacting to the way you’ve phrased it.